

## History of Michigan NRCS American Indian Program

By: Glenn Lamberg (2002)

BI A was the major governmental service provider to tribes natural resource needs in the past. At least up to the about 1989 when legislation was reinterpreted to allow other federal organizations to provide help to tribes. Wording in the 1990 Farm Bill, plus Presidential executive directives provided a push in the early 1990's for USDA to begin living up to it's trust responsibilities to help tribes. The self-sufficiency and self-dependency desires of the tribes also have provided some distance between tribes and BI A.

Some of the earliest noted conservation activities between SCS and tribes existed at Baraga between Fred Kekko, District Conservationist at Houghton and Fred Dakota of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community. This work begin in about 1972 with an RC& D project that the tribe and the UP RC&D sponsored. This early work and continued good relations is evident in the accomplishments that the Tribe continues to have in natural resources programs on the reservation. Bruce Petersen, NRCS Tribal Contact has worked closely with the tribe on 2 EQIP contracts and establishing a tribal conservation district as of May 2002.

1998 -NRCS tribal contacts named for each tribe.

Dwane Coffey named the first State tribal Liaison April 1998 and did the position as a collateral duty (20% time) until June 2000. Dwane's experience with working with Native Alaskans assisted him in the operations of this position.

*Period of time:* April 1998-May 2000

### *Types of activities:*

- Grant application for Bay Mills Community College: 1994 Land Grant-Natural resource education program.
- Battle Point Burial Ground efforts with Little River band
- Quarterly meetings with the tribal contacts were held.
- Tribal contacts were encourage to attend the Harmony program in WI at Bad River.

### *Major obstacles:*

- Only part time position, there was not enough time to work closely with tribes.

In 2000, the leadership team under the direction of Jane Hardisty, STC established the American Indian Liaison for Michigan. At this time Michigan had 12 federally recognized tribes, with the most recent tribe being the Gun Lake Band. In June 2000, Glenn Lamberg was selected for the American Liaison Position.

State of affairs reports were completed for program years 2001 and 2002 covering major items of progress during these periods.

The first Tribal Contact meeting with Glenn & MI NRCS tribal contacts was held in Sault Ste. Marie, MI April 30-May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002. Minutes from that meeting are available.

Reports are given to Ron Williams on a monthly basis from AI Liaison. These are items that are of major concern to NRCS relations.